

D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program

OVERVIEW & TALKING POINTS

- ✓ The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) is part of an innovative three-sector federal education initiative that was **requested, shaped, and championed by local D.C. leaders in 2004**. The OSP provides scholarships for children in very low-income District families to attend private schools. **Funding should be maintained at \$13.2 million for FY 2011 and the program should be reauthorized.**
- ✓ In March 2009, Education Secretary Arne Duncan revoked scholarships from 216 children who were enrolled for the 2010-2011 school year. **The Obama Administration and Congress have barred new children—even siblings—from enrolling and slashed program funding. This threatens the education of participating children and removes the OSP as an option for additional families who do not have educational choice.**
- ✓ The three-sector federal education initiative provided equal funding for D.C.'s public schools, charter schools, and the OSP. **Since FY 2009 however, the majority has turned this bipartisan initiative upside down, substantially increasing funding for two sectors and slashing the Opportunity Scholarship Program.**
- ✓ We do not know the results of the massive infusion of federal money into the other two sectors, but the OSP has been heavily scrutinized by both the executive and legislative branches. **Only the OSP has a proven and positive record of success as a result of the federal money.**
- ✓ **OSP is a federal program with PROVEN and POSITIVE results.**
 - Students who used their opportunity scholarships had a 21% higher graduation rate than students who were not offered scholarships, and participating OSP students continue to show academic gain.
- The U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) Institute for Education Sciences found that OSP participants' gains were the largest achievement impact of any of the 11 programs studied so far. DOE's own "What Works Clearinghouse" has validated the research behind the OSP.
- Four consecutive studies from Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas found that parents are very satisfied, more involved in their children's education, and becoming savvy educational consumers.
- ✓ **OSP is overwhelmingly popular with District families, residents, community, and business leaders.**
 - Nearly 9,000 low-income families have applied to participate in the program.
 - Polls in 2007, 2008, and 2009 by separate and unaffiliated organizations show between 64% and 80% of District residents support continuation the program.
 - The program is supported by key local Democratic leaders—Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, a majority of the City Council, as well as former Mayors Anthony Williams and Marion Barry.
- ✓ **OSP has helped more than 3,300 children attend the best schools they have ever known.**
 - 85% of OSP students would otherwise be attending a failing and all too often unsafe D.C. public school.
 - Average household income is approximately \$25,000 (much lower than the applicant eligibility limit of 185% of poverty).
- ✓ Pending reauthorization bills in the Senate (Lieberman) and the House (Boehner) would reauthorize the program for five years; allow new low-income students to enter the program; modestly increase the scholarship amounts; and continue a rigorous program evaluation.

The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: *Funding What Works.*

OSP EVALUATION RESULTS

- ✓ The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is working according to rigorous evaluations and focus group studies.
- ✓ **Four consecutive studies from Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas using a focus group model found:**
 - Parents are very satisfied and are more involved in their children’s education.
 - Parents are becoming savvy educational consumers.
 - Children have an improved attitude toward learning, increased self-esteem and enthusiasm towards school.
- ✓ **The Institute for Education Sciences (IES) at the Department of Education found that OSP participants’ gains are the largest achievement impact of any federal education experiment so far. IES impact reports have noted that:**
 - Major finding of the year four report is that **students who actually *used* their scholarships had graduation rates of 91%, 21% higher than those interested in the program who did not receive a scholarship.** Students randomly selected to receive scholarships had an 82% graduation rate—12 percentage points higher than the students who did not receive scholarships. The subgroup of students who received scholarships and came from failing schools had graduation rates that were 13% higher than the subgroup not offered scholarships. **When compared to the DCPS graduation rate of 48.8%, the graduation rates for students who used their scholarships were 42% higher.**
 - Year three report showed students selected for the program gained 3.1 months more in reading over 3 years of schooling than students who applied but were not selected by the lottery.
 - Parents are overwhelmingly satisfied—especially with safety.
 - OSP students attend schools that are more integrated and have smaller class sizes.
 - The Institute of Education Sciences studied the program using the most rigorous research design—“randomized control trial”—considered the gold standard of evaluation design. Scholarships were given by lottery to form a control/treatment group structure.

OSP POLLING

- ✓ **According to a July 2009 survey of 1,001 registered DC voters conducted by Braun Research, Inc:**
 - 74% of respondents said they favor or strongly favor the Opportunity Scholarship Program.
 - Support for the program is even higher—over 80%—for parents with school aged children.
 - When asked directly about ending the program, 79% of parents opposed to ending the program.
 - The poll also showed that a majority of residents think that the program should provide even more scholarships to low-income families. 61% of respondents said that the DC OSP should provide “as many scholarships as possible in order to meet demand.”
- ✓ **According to a June 2008 *Education Reform Now* poll of 500 respondents from DC:**
 - 77% of those surveyed said that they believe that “parents should be able to choose where their children attend schools” as opposed to relying on the Board of Education to make the choice.
 - 63% of those surveyed said that “working and poor parents should be given financial assistance in the form of a voucher to send their children to the school of their choice.”
- ✓ **According to an August 2007 Greater Washington Urban League poll of 400 respondents from DC:**
 - 64% favor using taxpayer funds to provide scholarships for low-income DC families.
 - 69% favor the federal three-sector funding initiative.

PENDING SENATE AND HOUSE OSP REAUTHORIZATION BILLS

- ✓ Provide a 5-year reauthorization of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP), which provides scholarships for low-income D.C. children to attend private schools in the District.
- ✓ The legislation would strengthen the program, and ensure financial, administrative and academic accountability. By providing additional funding to the D.C. public school system and D.C. public charter schools, the bills would help ensure that all D.C. students receive a high quality education.
- ✓ Bipartisan co-sponsors in the Senate: Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Susan Collins (R-ME), George Voinovich (R-OH), and John Ensign (R-NV).
- ✓ Provides equal funding for all D.C. schools – public, charter and OSP.
- ✓ Strengthens the OSP
 - Allows new children from low-income D.C. families to enter the program and maintains eligibility requirement that family income not exceed 185% of poverty.
 - Modestly increases scholarship amounts for K-8 and 9-12 to approximately 60% of DCPS per pupil amounts and adjusts amounts in future school years for inflation.
 - Adds a sibling preference to avoid separating families.
 - Removes legislative uncertainty that is harmful to families and schools.
- ✓ Enhanced Accountability Requirements
 - Requires annual testing of participating students with reporting to parents and federal evaluator.
 - Requires continuation of a rigorous federal evaluation of the program.
 - Requires participating schools to have a valid certificate of occupancy issued by the District of Columbia.
 - Requires that core teachers of OSP students have a baccalaureate or equivalent degree.
 - Ensures that schools share accreditation information with prospective families.
 - Requires proof of adequate financial resources for schools operating less than 5 years.
 - Requires adequate financial systems, controls & policies to ensure compliance with the program.

MYTHS VS. FACTS

- MYTH** The Opportunity Scholarship Program violates the separation of church and state and fails to adequately protect the civil rights of all students.
- FACT** The United States Supreme Court settled the question of whether vouchers are constitutional in the 2004 Zelman case. It is the parents who choose a private or parochial school for their participating child. Participating schools abide by all applicable local, state and federal regulations. Schools are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, sex (unless traditionally a single sex school—like many publicly funded educational institutions), national origin or age, in accordance to the law.
- MYTH** Discrimination of any kind is unconstitutional and not permitted when it comes to the use of federal funds.
- FACT** The U.S. Constitution and federal law ban many kinds of discrimination, but they do allow for federal funds to flow to public and private schools that are all boys or all girls schools. In addition, federal law has always allowed religious institutions to hire people from just their faith. The Constitution and existing federal discrimination laws allow for gender and religious discrimination in employment for all private schools receiving federal aid under any program. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which applies to all programs receiving federal financial assistance, including private schools, permits private schools to be single sex schools, at all levels, including college. “Discrimination” also takes place at single sex public charter schools, at magnet schools, and at academically strict baccalaureate schools.
- MYTH** The Opportunity Scholarship Program uses public funds to subsidize a private education for families who would otherwise pay for private school and takes the highest achievers out of public schools.
- FACT** To be eligible for the OSP, families must be below 185% of poverty, and the average family income of \$25,000 per year is well below that threshold. First preference is also given to students who are coming from the SINI (Schools in Need of Improvement) list. More than 85% of participating children are on that list.
- MYTH** Many scholarships go to students attending Catholic schools and the Opportunity Scholarship Program is really a benefit only to Catholic families.
- FACT** Between 45 percent and 80 percent of students attending Archdiocese of Washington schools and the Consortium of Catholic Academies are non-Catholic.
- MYTH** The federally mandated program evaluation shows that children are no better off in the voucher program.
- FACT** The Administration’s own “What Works Clearinghouse” validated the Institute for Education Sciences research on the OSP. The OSP is one of only three IES studies (out of 11) that shows any positive results and by far showed the most academic gain. The recent year four report shows that students who used their scholarships had a 21% higher graduation rate than students who were not offered a scholarship and students are continuing to show academic gain.